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ABSTRACT

STANDPOINTS, a model for general education which focuses on the common learning experiences crucial to the quality of personal and corporate life, was developed at Central YMCA Community College. When developing the model, time, faculty development, student involvement, and leadership constraints were recognized, and a three-phase process was used. The process involved the use of a general education consultant and public hearings to poll the college community's opinions on general education content. Subsequently, a design team of faculty members assembled the general education sequence, consisting of courses in Choice and Responsibility, Distance and Encounter, and Portent and Design; developed instructional materials for the courses; recruited instructors; and explained STANDPOINTS to the college community. The STANDPOINTS transdisciplinary, transgenerational sequence now stands at the center of the college curriculum and affords continuity, shared experience, flexibility, and relevance. In order to assure a successful shift for faculty to this integrated curriculum, two workshops were held. Additional efforts to promote STANDPOINTS' success were: (1) several pedagogical decisions, which focused on cognitive structures, values, sequential instructional strategies, mentoring, and group planning; (2) strategies to establish the integrity and credibility of the program on campus; and (3) several activities planned to evaluate the effects of STANDPOINTS. (AYC)

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STANDPOINTS: A MODEL FOR COMMON LEARNING

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> What is needed now is for some of our most eminent universities and strongest colleges to take time and make a major effort to understand the situation the college is in, and from that understanding to set up models for their conception of what the college ought to be and how it must function if it is to justify its position in the total plan of the country's educational establishment.
>
> Dean William Devane in Struggle and Promise, pp. vii-viii.

The Central YMCA Community College is a developing institution serving disadvantaged young adults in Chicago's Loop. We share little with the strong and the eminent but the lament over curricular incoherence, mismatched expectations of educational outcomes and the isolation of courses and programs from any intelligible context of shared experience.

We believe, however, that these times of disarray and disappointment in the quality of higher education provide us a unique opportunity to envision a pertinent model for liberal learning. It is this belief which prompted the major effort urged by Dean Devane.

To ourselves, then, we posed the guiding question: "Are there some experiences which are so crucial for the quality of personal and corporate life that they should be assured for all students?" We postulated that three sorts of experiences must be assured:

--those which confront the student with the mystery of him/herself.

--those which violate the sovereign isolation of the single person and reconstitute the student in global dimensions.

--those which provide the basis for sustained conversation with others in the collegiate community.

We supposed that specific content must be defined in such a way as to capitalize upon the phenomenology of expectations-varied and diverse-by which the college expresses its character and mission.

What we describe in these pages is our model for a set of common learnings, STANDPOINTS, and the strategies by which it evolved. The comments which follow reflect the focus, rationale, integrity and discipline of the process and the product which were, for us, appropriate and tenable from our institutional vantage.

CONSTRAINTS AND MECHANISMS

We sought confirmation of and counterpoints to our postulates through a variety of activities. We were, however, aware of several constraints within the organizational climate. With respect to time structuring, it was clear that quick, thoughtful action was required if the design and implementation of a sequence of common learnings were to occur by fall, 1981; expediency would impinge on the institution's disposition to temporize. With regard to faculty development, it was equally clear that an intensive course would be needed to acquaint the college community with the concept of a general education curriculum. We suspected that student involvement in contributing to such a curriculum would be minimal due to work and family commitments. In the matter of administrative resources, we knew that leadership in program development would issue solely from the office of the Dean of Curriculum and Instruction.

With full knowledge of the probable impacts of these constraints, we moved forward with the following plan:

PHASE I: Consultant Visit #1. The Dean engaged Dr. Lloyd J. Averill as consultant in general education. Dr. Averill brought his extensive experience to bear on the task of orienting faculty members and administrators to the demands of constituting a general education sequence. Among his many excellent recommendations was the suggestion of a series of college-wide public hearings to broaden awareness of the concept of general education and to solicit responses to our guiding question.

PHASE II: The Public Hearings. A week-long schedule of hearings in November, 1980 polled the college community on their opinions about the content of general education for our students. Transcripts of the taped proceedings revealed three themes, articulated mainly by students, who spoke of needs for 1) affective competencies through esteem-building experiences; 2) interpersonal competencies for effective living; and 3) intellectual competencies for inquiring, reasoning and integrating ideas. Faculty contributions, which tended toward rationalizing their own disciplines, paled before the impassioned pleas of students for excellence in teaching. It became evident that a design for a program of common learning must exceed the original expectation of transcending disciplinary boundaries and attempt to rekindle faculty enthusiasm for teaching.

PHASE III: Consultant Visit #2. Dr. Averill returned in December for a two-day consult with department chairpersons at which time the results of the hearings were aired. The main agenda focused on presentation of alternative models for a sequence of common learnings. The models outlined consisted of the Common Heritage Approach,

the Common Fate Approach, the Common Tools Approach and the Uncommon Individual Approach. Participants were instructed to choose an appropriate model, interpreted in light of the results of the hearings, and construct a sequence. Although a simulation exercise, this strategy was so artfully managed that participants felt their "sequence" would be adopted as the general education component at the College.

USING THE INFORMATION

While the fall activities centered on public hearings and consultant-faculty interactions, a different set of arrangements prevailed in the spring semester. A smaller group of faculty members (a design team) would have to assemble the sequence, develop instructional materials, recruit prospective teachers from among the faculty and explain the sequence to the college community. Two faculty members were released full-time to coordinate this work; four additional faculty members from various departments were assigned to furnish instructional materials and critique the developing sequence from the perspective of their respective disciplines

The design team meetings underscored the inadequacies of a single atomistic course as a unit of instruction. Our discussions convinced us that when the disciplines are reunited around that which they share--the problems of the world in which they function--and their faculties are summoned to address common problems in the presence of "shared" students, then connections are more easily made telling and relevant. In light of that realization, we saw the need for structures of association which would be both trans-disciplinary and trans-generational, that is, crossing disciplinary boundaries and crossing the semesterly generations typical of most

courses.

STANDPOINTS, in responding to that need, is presented as a sequence of three courses, one each in the three semesters subsequent to a student's placement at the college level. Each course is taught by faculty members from unlike disciplines, assigned to concurrently-scheduled sections. Faculty move through the "generations" of the Sequence from the initial course to the second and to the third with the same cadre of students. The courses within the Sequence: Choice and Responsibility, Distance and Encounter, and Portent and Design, are complemented by books of edited readings, designed within the College, and responsive to the competencies highlighted at the Public Hearings as well as by activity guides for instructors which offer a unified plan of organization for teaching the materials.

RELATION TO THE COLLEGE CURRICULUM

The STANDPOINTS sequence stands at the center of the college curriculum which is divided into three components: Integrated Studies, (STANDPOINTS), required of all students regardless of career or academic intent; Foundation Studies, particular to the major academic interest or vocation program itself, viz., BIO 101 in a program for radiologic technologists; and Special Studies, unique to the program and offered by the program itself. The STANDPOINTS sequence, set within the context of this institutional design, affords continuity and shared experience as well as flexibility and relevance within a richly diverse, highly interactive community.

PROVISIONS AND RESOURCES

Since teaching in STANDPOINTS represented a departure in both content and method for most instructors in the Sequence, provisions were made to assure a successful shift to participation in an

integrated curriculum. Two workshops were arranged to achieve this goal. The first, presented at the beginning of the summer session, introduced faculty to the materials gathered for the course. Faculty were exposed to unfamiliar teaching strategies inspired by Project ADAPT, SIMSOC, the simulated society game, and the Directed Reading and Thinking Activity (DRTA) model and were asked to experiment with their use. These workshop activities proved especially challenging to faculty members with an average of 10 years in the classroom with little or no direct observation of their teaching behaviors.

The second workshop, scheduled immediately prior to fall 1981 semester, aimed at refining methods and materials, devising a system of student evaluation and planning a calendar of cultural events. In this regard, the Dean was instrumental in allocating a sizeable portion of the Student Activities budget to the programming of events. The resultant Cultural Events Series has, in fact, become the core of shared experience outside the classroom for all students and has elevated both the quality of student activities and student and faculty morale.

A PEDAGOGY OF ENGAGEMENT AND REFLECTION

The pedagogy of STANDPOINTS seeks to promote the development of our student's integrative capacities as well as provide a matrix for the interrelation of multi-disciplinary content. It is characterized by the following features:

Attention to cognitive structure. Influenced by Piaget's cognitive stage theory articulated by Project ADAPT consultants, we organized materials to proceed from simple to complex and instructional strategies to move from concrete to more abstract operations.

Valuing. As patterns of human agency which give meaning to life, values and the process of valuing are integrated into course materials and adjunctive exercises.

Organization of instructional strategies. We devised a paradigm providing for warm-up activities which provoke engagement in the materials, understand activities which assure comprehension of the materials and respond activities which stimulate personally reflective connections with the ideas expressed in the materials.

Mentoring. The trans-generational sequencing of courses and frequent one-to-one meetings between student and instructor assure the kinds of interaction needed to build student self-esteem, reinforce intentions and guide follow through on assignments and projects.

Group Planning. The integrity of our pedagogy is reinforced by twice-weekly meetings with instructors in STANDPOINTS to which we bring notice of triumph and failure, refinements of course plans, informal evaluative comments and insights on course progression.

RATIONALIZING STANDPOINTS

Although we are a small college, we operated as a multiversity. The wisdom of this position was challenged by the Dean who inquired whether it was appropriate that the only academic experience common to all students was their enrollment in English 101. We struggled through our complacency with the status quo to answer the question which keynotes this article. Many of us are still struggling.

We did, however, strive to establish the integrity and credibility of STANDPOINTS. We mailed the completed outlines for courses in the Sequence to the institutions to which many of our graduates transfer and learned that in all cases STANDPOINTS courses were transferable. Responses to our inquiries were often accompanied by

complimentary comments regarding the educative value of the Sequence. This information, which we shared with the College community, quieted many of the objections posed by dissenting faculty members about the external validity of STANDPOINTS. At several points in the spring '81 semester, strategically-timed newsletters were circulated within the College allowing us to contribute information and address reservations about STANDPOINTS directly, and meetings were held during which sample materials were distributed and instructional methods modeled. A particularly effective technique for winning further support for STANDPOINTS was the appeal to faculty to identify members from among their number who might qualify as suitable instructors in the Sequence. Responses to this appeal led us not only to the instructors identified but to nominating faculty as well. It was a source of immense gratification to program designers that more faculty were recruited to participate in the workshops than could be accommodated with teaching assignments.

PROGRAM EVALUATION.

The effects of the STANDPOINTS sequence on student performance and attitudes are measured by the ACT (COMP) test, Form III, a self-report and exit interview. Following each of the three courses, variations on the Rokeach Value Inventory and questionnaires assessing satisfaction with the learning experience, course content and instructional methods are administered. Participating faculty complete a questionnaire measuring their attitudes toward the adequacy of course content, pedagogy and requesting suggestions for improvement of the Sequence. Other members of the college community are administered an Organizational Climate Index which measures perception of effect of STANDPOINTS on the ethos of the College.

CONCLUSIONS

Now that the courses in STANDPOINTS are in operation, testimony from students and faculty is its best source of continuing support. That testimony is communicated to the College through informal comments and through a newsletter compiled by instructors and students in STANDPOINTS, both of which help sustain our enthusiasm for this project.

STANDPOINTS is a construct for what we believe common learning should be where we are. We believe it represents a substantial contribution to private education, one new and unprecedented in community college education, a vital and engaging learning experience for faculty and students.

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